

## Williams-at-Home

### A Study of Private and Public Life in America

Spring 1971

#### THE INTENTION

This program is proposed for the academic year 1971-72 to include approximately 15 of the present freshman and sophomores. There are two parts to the year: 1) the fall term in residence at Williams with four semester courses 2) January through the end of May in living situations outside of Williams.

The second half of the year makes use of experience as education. This experience is other than the student. It is not the personal experience which the student has grown up with, what has identified him, what he considers especially his own. Rather it involves other people, contemporary issues, public institutions which are different, even alien, to the students. It is an approach to private and public life in America in terms of experiences unknown to many students.

The experience originates with other people: four home stays in very different life situations. Each student will live with four separate families: January 3-February 11 (six weeks) with auto workers in Detroit; February 15-March 17 (five weeks) with small retail traders in a rural area of Arkansas; March 20-April 21 (five weeks) with marginal farmers in Appalachia; April 24-May 26 (five weeks) with productive farmers in Iowa.

It is assumed that the ordinary Williams student has been raised in the restricted life setting of a suburban community and in an exclusive family situation which have not stressed either encounters or conflicts with people of contrasting backgrounds, opinions, sensibilities. This background has restricted the student's experience of the character and complexity of public life; of the deep going oppositions, tensions, reactions so much a part of contemporary politics; of the hard flooring, built-in pressures, sudden confusion of political and institutional action; of the uncertainty, partiality, unfinished nature of any decision and choice. Too much of public action and controversy, too many institutions and claims are invisible to this sensibility and experience. This program is intended to correct this restricted quality of the student's background through the experience of public institutions and contemporary issues as seen from families in the four different life and work situations. The student will approach experience through the family with whom he lives. He will try to see as they see, both through their overt, consciously expressed, public opinions and through their every-day, family-wide, private sensibilities. These two somewhat conflicting parts of response will be contrasted. It is hoped the student will go beyond insight into these different kinds of experience to reflection upon them with the aid of the various analytical resources Williams provides in the fall.

During the months in the field, three kinds of discussions will be arranged: 1) discussion of contemporary issues and the character of local institutions with

with host families and with outside informants who have relevant expertise and background; 2) review of what has been understood and learned in the family environment with participation by students and host families; 3) three days of seminars with the students alone at the end of each of the four parts of the program to ascertain what effect the previous weeks have had upon their own judgment and perception. There will also be student papers of assessment required at the end of each home stay. These discussions and papers aim to give focus and some clarity to the student's method of educating himself and to the development of his judgment.

#### PARTICIPATION OF THE STUDENT

1) Each student will be given a suggested reading list for the summer, including novels, descriptions, analyses of the quality of life and authority in America.

2) During the summer, each student will write an essay on the meaning of public authority as reflected practically and concretely in his experience up until the present time. He will be encouraged to examine the content of his own education and how he has learned in his home, in school, from his peers, on his own. The paper will be due at the beginning of the fall semester and will be shared with other students in the program.

3) Each student will take Political Science 331, a single credit course on Public Authority in America. The course description reads: "A study that aims to clarify the grounds of authority, of law, of public order in the United States and of the major critiques made of them. The responses of separate communities characterized by class, race, religion, ethnicity, occupation, education, region will be examined. Emphasis will be both on the private and personal sensibilities and on the public judgments and rational opinions."

4) The required project for each student in this course will be the approach to institutions and practical political issues in Williamstown through the perceptions and judgments of a local resident. The students will exchange information and insight with each other in order to reach some kind of assessment of public life in Williamstown. During the fall, there will be three films on the contemporary institutions of police, schools, hospitals, as well as selected films of the 1930's and 1940's, reflecting some of the tastes and values of those years. There will also be visits from outsiders: persons associated with life and work situations that the students will be experiencing in the spring.

5) Each student will take three other courses in the fall, selected after consultation, according to his interest in American studies and his major requirements.

6) Each student will be expected to complete the four home stays, both living and working with the family under conditions satisfactory to both sides. It may be necessary in exceptional instances to make an adjustment of the living situation.

7) There will be two kinds of scheduled discussions with host families: on the significance and consequences of the living situation itself and on issues relevant to the life and work of the host families. Possible topics might include the status of collective bargaining, shifts in the use of land and in

agricultural practices, advantages of life in a small town, proper police power, civil service strikes, value and viability of small scale enterprise, pressures upon local schools, character and quality of health services, demands of the black community, significance of low income housing.

8) Special emphasis will be placed on three institutions: police, schools, health facilities. These institutions will be touched upon in the summer readings, in the fall course discussions, in the films, in the project on Williams-town. Students will trace their own family's interest in and response to these institutions, and make some assessment of their operation in the community.

9) Toward the end of each home stay, the students will spend three days together in seminars reviewing that part of the program.

10) At the conclusion of each of the first three home stays, a paper of assessment, evaluation, reflection, will be required in a form and length appropriate to each student's understanding and talent. Content should include, not all necessarily or exclusively in one paper, a description of the family's life conditions and work and leisure, their views of public authority, the comparison between his own and his family's judgments of policies and institutions, contrast of the different life situations he finds himself in, reflection on what and how he has learned especially as it relates to what was available to him in his previous education. Each student is encouraged to keep a journal as both an incentive to reflection and a source for his papers.

11) At the conclusion of the final home stay, the student will write a paper on his own present judgment of public authority, and how it has changed or remained the same. He will judge the educational aims and methods of the program and how they have affected him. Comparison will be made with his paper written at the beginning of the program. These papers will constitute part of the overall evaluation of the program.

12) The four courses in the fall will be graded according to the usual Williams procedures. In the second half of the program, each student will receive academic credit equal to one semester's work and to one winter study period, but not a letter grade. Credit is dependent upon the requirements above.

#### FINANCING

The administrative and academic costs should be covered by the student's tuition fees. The student's transportation and living expenses should be covered by the returned board and room costs at Williams for the winter study and second semesters. It is expected that payments will be made to the families for home stays.

#### OBJECTIVES OF THE PROGRAM

1) To provide an environment in which the student takes responsibility for his own learning and for testing his personal strength of patience, insight, and reflection under difficult external demands.

2) To open to the student an encounter with the separateness of public institutions, with the deep oppositions in contemporary issues, with the real differences in people's life and work conditions in order to move beyond the exclusive nature of the student's class and educational situation.

3) To help the student move by and through this experience of private and public life in America to the more systematic analyses of the traditional disciplines at Williams College.

EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM

1) Faculty members other than the instructor will interview each student both before and after the program to determine its effect on the student's education.

2) The final paper by each student in the course will be part of the evaluation of the program.

3) On return in the fall, a public forum on the achievements and failures of the program will be held with students participating.

4) Both the instructor and selected students will propose a written report for the CEP analyzing the structure, methods, and intention of the program against the reality of its operation.